Strengthening New Teacher Agency through Holistic Mentoring

Deborah Bieler

If emerging teachers are going to be something more than technicians, they need to reflect on their instructional worldviews, the mission of schools, and their role as autonomous professionals. The model described here emphasizes the sense of agency that leads to reflection and resiliency.

And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own. . . . My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living.

Though she speaks here specifically of women, Audre Lorde has much to say to all educators, particularly new teachers and their mentors. Her words make me think about how separation reigns in traditional American education: the school day is divided into time periods, punctuated by ringing bells; individual teachers spend these periods in separate classrooms teaching separate subjects; and students are separated by age and, sometimes, by ability, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic background. The experiences of new and preservice teachers, too, are often characterized by various kinds of separation—for example, separation from one another during most of the school day, the sometimes-separate roles of “learner” and “teacher” that they must learn to weave together, and the physical and ideological distances between their schools and their university coursework. In all this separate-ness, what might be considered a “caring” education (Noddings), one that is filled with humane interactions, is often absent. This absence can prohibit us from meeting others’ deep human need to be taken seriously, to be understood. In the current data-driven educational climate, such interactions may be more important than ever in sustaining the spirits of the newest members of our profession.

Most educators and teacher educators are aware of the astonishing 50% teacher dropout rate within the first five years of teaching (Ingersoll), but it is important for us to remember that mentoring has been proven to increase retention, particularly after the first year (Ingersoll and Smith 33). To respond to the call for research that examines the makeup of successful mentoring relationships (e.g., Evans; Hawkey; NCRTL; Slick), I studied my year-long mentoring relationship with four secondary English student teachers enrolled in a master’s-level teacher certification program. As a mentor committed to holism (as I explain below), I wanted to know how this commitment played out in my daily interactions with the student teachers and how it affected their professional development. In this article, I

—Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches
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show how three pedagogical “moves” I made as a holistic mentor helped my student teachers forge and voice newfound professional identities and a sense of agency when we engaged in literacy practices together. Our mentoring relationships highlight the fact that none of us stops being ourselves when we become teachers, and when we seek to integrate the different aspects of our identities, we strengthen our ability to be agentive as teachers and learners.

Background: Making Connections and Taking Action

Education that serves to enhance our students’ journey to wholeness stands as a challenge to the existing status quo.

—bell hooks, Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope

What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.


In my early experiences as a student, a student teacher, and a teacher, I often noticed how, in any educational setting, the degree to which I felt valued as a human being directly correlated with the degree to which I felt empowered to voice my opinion or to step out of my learning or teaching comfort zones. As a doctoral student preparing to become a mentor of student teachers, I was inspired by the writings of bell hooks and Paulo Freire, who conceptualize teaching as fundamentally relational. Based on their work, I came to understand holistic mentoring practice as a way both to enact and promote more just, contextually responsive educational experiences. Holistic mentoring practice involves reciprocal teaching and learning and emphasizes individual autonomy (Freire, “A Response”); thus, it disrupts the banking model (Freire, Pedagogy) as it occurs in teacher preparation programs that position student teachers primarily as receptacles for knowledge about teaching. I came to embrace the term mentoring in contrast to supervising, a hierarchical term that emphasizes the supervisor’s assessment of teacher performance.

I also drew on Mary Rose O’Reilly’s and Nel Noddings’s work on holism to conceptualize holistic mentoring as mentoring that is continually poised to explore all the factors that contribute to student teachers’ developing professional identities—their beliefs, goals, worldviews, life experiences, and expectations. Such a practice goes beyond the traditional lexicons of schooling—of lesson plans, assessment, subject matter, and standards—by valuing and deliberately seeking to integrate the “in school” with the “out of school.” Taking a holistic mentoring stance is rooted in the desire to make connections, build relationships, and mend false separations in and out of educational spaces to construct meaningful teaching and learning experiences.

Holistic mentoring of new teachers could be considered an activist pedagogy that works against (1) the ways in which teacher preparation programs often essentialize student teachers by positioning them only as student teachers and (2) the ways in which new teachers often experience student teaching and the first year(s) of teaching as a time merely to “survive” or to “get through with the least amount of pain,” as Laura and Rebecca, two student teachers in this study, stated, respectively. Such perceptions, which perennially accompany assessment-oriented student teaching, threaten to follow new teachers into the rest of their professional careers.

Recognizing the increasing pressures to standardize and quantify teaching, I wondered whether holistic mentoring might be a way to strengthen teacher agency, which Janet H. Murray defines as “the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices” (126). Having a strong sense of agency helps teachers retain a sense of control and remain resilient as an ever-spinning policy whirlwind threatens to uproot
cluded more than 11,000 K–12 classroom teachers and more than 200,000 students, approximately 80% of whom were eligible for reduced-price school meals. The four predominant racial groups represented in the student body were African American (65%), Latino/Latina (15%), Caucasian (15%), and Asian (5%). The district included approximately 40 high schools, which were either vocational, comprehensive (neighborhood), or magnet (admission-based) schools.

Joss, Laura, Rebecca, and Walt

The student teachers came to Evans with a common desire to teach English, but they had diverse backgrounds and beliefs about English, teaching, and life. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the four student teachers’ experiences and identities during this program. All of us, as individuals with unique beliefs, interests, worldviews, goals, and expectations, interacting in a variety of contexts, brought different aspects of our identities to bear at different moments in our relationships. The examples of these moments, described below, show not only how varying contexts brought out varying aspects of our identities but illustrate what happened when this constant interplay of identities was embraced—and when the energy held in that embrace was used.

Creating Openings for New Teachers’ Voices

One of the pedagogical moves I made as a holistic mentor is that I worked to create openings for student teachers’ voices, particularly in the early stage of my relationships with them, to cultivate their sense of agency. The example below provides a vivid depiction of not only how what Joss called “your outside voice” can be systematically quieted inside schools but also how mentors can create spaces in which new teachers can raise their voices. This example occurred the day after Labor Day, during the opening minutes of Laura’s student teaching experience and her first meeting between her cooperating teachers and university-based mentors in both English and history. The primary goal of this meeting was to orient Laura to the school and to determine how she should split her time between her two cooperating teachers’ schedules. The meeting’s lightning-fast pace and multiple beginning-of-year
## Strengthening New Teacher Agency through Holistic Mentoring

**FIGURE 1. Aspects of Student Teachers’ Holistic Identities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Joss</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Rebecca</th>
<th>Walt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>28–29</td>
<td>21–22</td>
<td>22–23</td>
<td>21–22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certification area(s)</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English Social Studies</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School placement(s)</strong></td>
<td>Fall: Pare HS (magnet)</td>
<td>Hemlick HS (comprehensive magnet)</td>
<td>Fall: Ferrarro HS (comprehensive)</td>
<td>Pare HS (magnet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of out-of-school time</strong></td>
<td>Wrote in his journal about every day to document and struggle through his experiences</td>
<td>Observed the Sabbath and practiced Jewish orthodoxy</td>
<td>Served as a primary caregiver for her mother, who was fighting cancer</td>
<td>Nurtured and then coped with the end of a long-distance relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read widely</td>
<td>Went on dates set up by her friends in the Jewish community</td>
<td>Held jobs as a restaurant hostess and a nanny</td>
<td>Revised a novel he began as an undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spent time with his wife</td>
<td>Managed diabetes and prioritizing her health</td>
<td>Drove one hour (each way) between home and school</td>
<td>Applied to English PhD programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Took care of his dog, who was often ill</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication preferences</strong></td>
<td>Regarded email with some disdain and preferred to meet face-to-face</td>
<td>Did not waste words over email</td>
<td>Talked by phone, late in the evening or on the weekend, or face-to-face at school</td>
<td>Sent or replied immediately to email at all hours of the day and night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>However, often exchanged voluminous and impassioned email with me</td>
<td>Talked by phone, early on weekday evenings, or face-to-face at school</td>
<td>Talked by phone, late in the evening or on the weekend, or face-to-face at school</td>
<td>Lingered over one-on-one conversations, never in a hurry to conclude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception of the teacher preparation program</strong></td>
<td>Was critical of the program</td>
<td>Spoke often of her high stress level, characterizing the program as “overwhelming”</td>
<td>Refused to be stressed by program requirements</td>
<td>Was critical of the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desired liberatory pedagogy</td>
<td>Supported program philosophy and requirements</td>
<td>Positioned herself as her own teacher</td>
<td>Found program’s pedagogical practice to be inconsistent with professed theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expectations for mentoring relationships</strong></td>
<td>Had previous mentoring experience in which he could talk through issues of concern to him</td>
<td>Lamented that among her community of friends, “no one understands” the work of teaching</td>
<td>Viewed parents as long-standing and most influential mentors</td>
<td>Had previous mentoring experience and very fond memories of informal meetings with thesis advisors as an undergraduate in an English department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making connections with others has always been of great importance to him</td>
<td>Sought out and regularly had lunch with a group of women teachers during the second half of the year, to discuss teaching</td>
<td>Often discussed philosophy and politics with family members</td>
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urgencies rendered Laura silent and her personal concerns as secondary or irrelevant. In my field notes, I noted what happened when I intervened:

I turn to Laura and ask what she's thinking or what questions she has—since it has occurred to me that she hasn't been saying much at all—and/or that there has been little space for her to do so. She says that she is wondering when she's going to be able to eat, which is a real concern for her health and sugar levels. One of the teachers, Mena, says that she doesn't eat "in front of [her] kids." The other, Julie, recites, "No food, no hats, no electronic equipment." After a brief pause, Laura worries aloud that she won't have a chance even to eat between classes since it looks like she'll be running back and forth from classroom to classroom (which are, by the way, about a 6 minutes' walk apart in crowded hallways). Julie says something about having a hard candy or something during class, and Julie and Mena quickly move the conversation along to how they get to know students at the beginning of the year and what methods they use to record grades.

The nature of Laura's concerns did not fit easily into this discursive space, as the two classroom mentors' responses show. Prior to this meeting, Laura had shared the details of her diabetic condition with all of her mentors, and so the fact that Laura had this concern was not new. What was new at this meeting was the relationship between her condition and the school context. Additionally, what became increasingly apparent to me were the ways in which Laura's health concerns and dietary needs, together with the seeming incompatibility of the school day, could create additional stressors in Laura's experience, even more severe health problems, or a negative relationship to the teaching profession overall.

During this meeting, I made several noteworthy pedagogical moves as a holistic mentor. My first move was actually a physical one, as I moved my desk closer to Laura's side and repositioned my notes on Julie's and Mena's courses toward Laura in an effort to support and encourage her voice in this conversation about her schedule, which ironically began without her input. My movement had the effect of interrupting the conversation, which was moving too quickly and without Laura's involvement. Reducing the distance between us—as opposed to a more detached handing-off of my notebook—involved an element of intimacy. My second move was to ask Laura where she would like to be during the morning hours of school. My direct address to Laura was an attempt to create a space for her to respond, to exert some control over the trajectory of the meeting. Although Laura's initial response was tentative and brief, she did respond—and this response may have helped pave the way for her subsequent participation in the meeting. My third move in this scene was the way in which I worded the university student-teaching requirement about which Julie asked: instead of positioning the university as the governing agent in my response, my language (in the phrases "Laura can choose . . ." and "if she likes") positioned Laura as having agency, again an attempt on my part to create a space in which Laura's voice could be central. Finally, near the end of this interaction, I again addressed Laura directly, this time physically turning toward her and directly inviting her to voice her thoughts and questions, which she did, thereby taking an important step in advocating for herself but also in working out her student-teaching schedule in a way that honored her unique identity.

Listening for and Inquiring into Holistic Possibilities

A second kind of holistic mentoring move in which I engaged involved exhibiting continuous inquisitiveness, listening carefully to the student teachers, making personal connections, and inquiring with them about how this new information connected with their ever-developing identities as teachers and learners. The reward of such moves is not only an increased, broader understanding of one another but also the development of a collegial, professional relationship.

One example of such an interaction occurred between Walt and me in mid-October, in the strangely quiet copy room during a prep period, about a week before Walt would begin teaching his short story unit in two ninth-grade classes. He was far from cheerful as he expressed frustration with the school's lack of resources, particularly that there were no class sets of books because the school did not have enough copies for every student...
to take one home at night. He worried about how this would curtail the amount and depth of class discussion about the literature when so much of the class time is spent doing the reading itself. Soon Walt explained that he was “feeling close to saying” that he didn’t want to pursue a career teaching high school—the first time he expressed such a reservation. Walt eventually described one of the primary reasons for this feeling: what he desired to teach was “at odds with” what he understood the students to need or desire to learn. I asked him to tell me more about these things, and Walt pointed out that the majority of the books on his shelf at home are written by white male authors, and that this is not a conscious decision, but rather just what he likes to read. Our conversation then moved to issues of “taste” and “comfort,” and I suggested that what one considers “merit” is culturally bound; I shared a story of how I treasure Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart for the very reason that it was initially unsettling to me. I then articulated something I’d been noticing about the way Walt was expressing himself throughout our meeting:

Deb: . . . I mean I think there’s just so many different kinds of merit. I don’t think. I’m just trying to understand, when you say “it has merit,” like it is something that it has, or it’s something that you, it’s something that you deem intrinsic and, and extrinsic something.

Walt: To, to put it another way, something may have resonance, and not resonate with me.

Deb: OK.

Walt: You know?

Deb: Yeah, so there’s, there’s two different—

Walt: Right.

Deb: —things. Yeah.

Walt: Um. I’m, I’m trying to. Like. Uh. Uh. Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Deb: Yeah?

Walt: I really like the style of it. I think some of, some of the passages in there are just pure poetry. The story I could care less about. And whether that’s a factor of, you know, I, a white male coming from a fairly affluent family, versus a, a poor black woman, I don’t know whether that’s a factor or not, but I just, the story, I didn’t care about these people, I just, I, I would not want to teach that because I don’t care about it. And I’m not denying that it has—

Deb: Why don’t you care about it?

Walt: ‘Cause it’s not interesting to me.

Deb: Why?

Walt: ‘Cause it’s not interesting to me.

Deb: I’m just trying to, I wanna see what’s going on here. Like if there’s some kind of. What’s your filter in—

Walt: I’m, I’m not sure . . .

Deb: See, that’s. That would be interesting to think about. ‘Cause even today, you’ve said like a number of things are either interesting or not interesting. Like there seems to be—

Walt: Oh there, definitely!

Deb: —a big binary going on with—

Walt: Absolutely!

Deb: —with your experience right now.

Walt: There definitely is . . .

Deb: I’m just, I’m wondering what’s underneath that. There, there’s some kind of filtering going on that isn’t obvious yet.

Walt: Definitely. I mean, you know, I’m listing in my head the people who are one side and the people who are on the other—

Deb: OK . . . [sound of Deb flipping to a blank page in her notebook] [laugh]

Walt: Man!

Deb: I think this will be helpful.

Walt: OK.

My mentoring moves in the first half of this exchange were moves toward understanding Walt better: in this attempt I made statements (e.g., “so there’s two different things”) and asked questions (e.g., “Why don’t you care about it?”), both of which demonstrate an interest in and a curiosity about Walt as a unique individual. The next set of moves I made in the second half of this interaction involved steps that helped build a collegial
relationship. First, I paid close attention to Walt's language usage during the preceding portion of our meeting; I listened carefully to the language that he used and the pattern (the binary of interesting/not interesting) that had become apparent to me. I then shared my observation with Walt and, after he confirmed the verity of the pattern, I asked him more about it—and we began to inquire together into the nature of this pattern. The “interesting/not interesting list,” as we came to call it, that Walt and I sketched in my notebook grew to include not only the names of authors, texts, and literary periods but also university courses as well as subjects within high school English (such as grammar). It actually prompted a great deal of additional writing and a yearlong inquiry into the relationship between who Walt was as a reader and writer of literature and who Walt was becoming as a teacher of literature.

This example helps illustrate the notion of listening for and inquiring into holistic possibilities, aspects of our identities that appear to be uninvestigated or compartmentalized. For me, experiencing such a process with Walt served as a powerful example of the fruits of prioritizing the crossing of the traditional boundaries of mentoring work. Namely, I observed that when Walt's identity as a teacher informed and was informed by his identity as a learner, he experienced an increased sense of agency as a decision-maker. In his end-of-year reflections, he wrote that "Never once [in our courses] were we really asked what kind of teachers we want to be . . . [How] we think about what we're doing in a classroom were ignored in favor of learning as much as possible about lesson plans or methods"; however, he considered his "circle of mentors," which included Joss, Laura, Rebecca, and me, the source of his "truer education" in which he "learn[ed] about who I am as a teacher, who I am as a student, who I am as a reader and a writer, and simply who I am." He closed with a contrast between two treasured artifacts, his diploma and a photo of our mentoring group: "And if what I learned [at Evans] can be measured by what I think of when I talk to my own students, what I talk about when I talk about my teaching, what still lives in me, well, I know which one of these artifacts represents the truer education."

Cultivating Holistic, Agentive Teaching, and Learning Practices

A third holistic mentoring move that helped me foster new teacher agency involved maintaining a holistic perspective of the student teachers’ students. During mentoring interactions, I worked to reinforce a view of their students as more than just students—as people with richly complex lives, of which school (and, to an even lesser extent, English class) is but one part. This approach mirrored the approach I took with the student teachers themselves; it encouraged them to initiate with their own students the wide embrace of connections that they had experienced in the mentoring relationship.

The example below occurred in my written response to Laura’s final portfolio, which included a section titled “Commentary on a Student Whom I Feel I Did Not Reach.” Laura had written thoughtful, compelling questions about teaching Robert, a quiet student in her third-period English class, and described both frustration and compassion as she began to understand the pervasiveness of an important non-school aspect of Robert’s life. As illustrated in the first column of Figure 2, Laura included a poem Robert wrote; in the second column is her reflection on this poem. In turn, I responded to Robert’s poem and Laura’s reflections by writing in the margins of Laura’s portfolio, and in my overarching response letter to her portfolio, both represented in the third column.

In this response and others like it, I attempted to remind student teachers of possible connections between their interactions with students and aspects of their own identities, beliefs, or experiences. Here, I encouraged Laura to take the next step by allowing the (com)passion she illustrated in other areas of her life to spill over into both her physical and written ways of being with Robert as a fellow whole human being.

The Value of Holistic Mentoring

A concern for the critical and the imaginative, for the opening of new ways of “looking at things” is
FIGURE 2. Layers of Holistic Comments

Robert:
(A handwritten poem, with bolded notes above and below from Laura—A stanza by stanza description of the poem appears below.)

Late

3rd period

Stanza 1: Using ABAB rhyme scheme, Robert expresses the promise and power of music to overwhelm, express, and heal.

Stanza 2: In ABAB rhyme scheme again, Robert describes how playing his guitar helps him understand and find his true self.

Stanza 3: Robert illustrates, again using ABAB rhyme, how music helps him fight feelings of depression.

Stanza 4: Using ABAB and powerful line repetition, Robert concludes by affirming his identity as a guitarist.

Wow! This is great, Robert! ✓

Laura:
Typed commentary, titled “A Student Whom I Feel I Did Not Reach”

Robert C. is a quiet intelligent student who lives in his own world. He often seems depressed but will chuckle occasionally at a humorous comment. He is loathe to work collaboratively and only moves his chair to work with others upon my insistence. All year I struggled with whether or not he should be allowed to work by himself when he asked if he could. I did not see why I should make an exception if everyone else had to work together. Besides, isn’t group work a fundamental skill that all students should learn at some point in high school? Shouldn’t Robert just learn to overcome his aversion?

I stuck to my conviction that Robert should not work alone yet I well knew that he did not contribute much of anything while in these collaborative situations. How could I get him to work together with his peers? Moreover, I could never get him to whisper even a word during class discussions. Where was Robert’s voice? I certainly saw his intelligent remarks in his writing but the rest of the class was never privy to such enlightenment.

During the first parent-teacher conference night, I learned from Robert’s parents that he had experienced a great trauma that might explain some of his reclusive behavior. His mother explained that Robert had been present while one of his friends committed suicide. I listened in horror and sadness as she told [my co-op] and me what had happened.***

Though I tried repeatedly to try to make Robert feel comfortable enough to share his voice with the class, he did not.** For the poetry coffee house, however, Robert brought his guitar. I was quite excited about the possibility of his playing but in the end he was not able to perform because he forgot that his electric guitar needed an amplifier.***

Nevertheless, I have included a poem that he wrote to show his love for music and his quiet passion. I hope he heals soon from the loss of his friend and finds an environment in which he feels comfortable enough to share his voice.****

Deb:
(Top: handwritten notes in Laura’s margins that correspond with the asterisks in her text. Bottom: paragraph from overarching portfolio response)

‘yes—this is so incredibly horrible . . . I can’t imagine.

**which is a democratic right, too

***Is that what happened?? I’d noticed, too, and he nodded when I asked him if he was planning to play for us. I wonder if this is true or if he just changed his mind?

***Again, I’m wondering how you would like to have worked differently with Robert now, if given the chance. I hesitate to say this—because it’s Hallmark-y, incredibly trite and because you’ve probably heard this before, but what springs to my mind here is this saying: “They’ll never care how much you know until they know how much you care.” How could you have loved Robert, cared for him, more? Is there any poem you could have shared especially with him? Or a guitar music tape/CD you enjoy? Would you have been comfortable putting your hand on his shoulder, often, asking him how he’s doing today, how his music is going, what he thinks of the class?

I couldn’t help but notice how your very brief response to Robert’s poem is evaluative in nature (“Wow, this is great”). I don’t think that there’s anything necessarily wrong with that (these comments are obviously positive, and I’m sure he appreciated that!), it’s just that what this young man was writing about is so personal, so painful (he took the opportunity seriously, which is also noteworthy and a testament to the trust he must have had in you)—and I guess I thought that a human, a humane response to what he was writing about was conspicuously absent. My feeling is that it makes a difference in relationship-building, in community-building, when we can give responses without being (purely) evaluative (for example, in response to Robert’s last stanza: “I won’t argue with you, but it looks to me like you’re a lyricist, too!” or, more generally: “I’m glad you’ve found music to be a place of refuge. What kind of music do you find to be most healing for you?” I’m not sure these are the best examples, but do you know what I mean?).
wholly at odds with the technicist and behaviorist emphases we still find in American schools.

—Maxine Greene, The Dialectic of Freedom

The challenge . . . is to devise the kinds of pedagogies that might provoke young people to develop a sense of oughtness, to think (if things were otherwise) about the kinds of human beings they would like to be.

—Maxine Greene, “The Question of Standards”

The mentoring relationships I had with these four student teachers accessed powerful extracurricular influences that significantly enriched our teaching and learning practices and confirmed Hull and Katz’s conclusion that participation in literacy practices is linked to the development of agentic selves. Such development is essential for new teachers: because holistic mentoring shapes and is shaped by participants’ unique individual identities, it provides new teachers an experience in agentive professional development—a kind of professional development that is driven not by external factors but rather by the participants’ identities, questions, and aspirations. My experience has convinced me that participation in holistic mentoring contributes to the authentication, or de-falsification, of the traditional student teaching experience, an experience that Rebecca named as “artificial.” She argued, “To do student teaching successfully is a skill in itself that I . . . may never use . . . again.” One of the main arguments that this study offers to teacher preparation scholarship is that it challenges the distinction between “rehearsal” and “performance” (Merrill) during the student teaching experience by suggesting that when preparation programs create spaces for their agency, student teachers can engage in teaching and learning that is authentic, similar to what they engage in as professionals after the formal mentoring relationship has ended.

Further, shifting the goal of mentoring (Cochran-Smith and Paris 181) from assisting and assessing student teachers’ professional acclimatization to engaging collectively and holistically with them can give rise to possibilities for disrupting the status quo of “schooling.” Holistic mentoring relationships can serve as a space of sustenance in which teachers can cultivate agentive visions for their work in the world—not only their own, but their colleagues’ and their students’ as well.

Works Cited


Strengthening New Teacher Agency through Holistic Mentoring


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**READWRITETHINK CONNECTION**

Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

The ReadWriteThink.org lesson plan “Draft Letters: Improving Student Writing through Critical Thinking” asks students to think critically about their writing on a specific assignment before submitting their work to a reader. Students write reflective letters to the teacher, identifying their own thoughts on the piece that the teacher is about to read. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/draft-letters-improving-student-902.html

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**CEE Awards Announced**

A number of awards were presented by the Conference on English Education at the NCTE Annual Convention in Las Vegas. The 2012 James N. Britton Award for Inquiry within the English Language Arts was presented to Sara Kajder, *Adolescents and Digital Literacies: Learning Alongside Our Students* (National Council of Teachers of English, 2010). The 2012 Cultural Diversity Grants went to Zaira R. Arvelo-Alicea and Ileana Cortes Santiago for their proposals, “Enhancing ELLs’ Reading Skills through Music, Storytelling, and Digital Media” and “Latino/a Families—English Educators’ Literacy Partnerships.” The 2012 Janet Emig Award for Exemplary Scholarship in English Education was presented to Brian White for his article, “The Vulnerable Population of Teacher-Researchers; Or, ‘Why I Can’t Name My Coauthors’” (*English Education*, July 2011). The Richard A. Meade Award for Teacher Research was presented to Dana Maloney, Tenafly High School, Tenafly, New Jersey. Awarded the 2012-2013 CEE Research Initiative Grants were Emily Hodge, The Pennsylvania State University: How English Teachers Make Sense of the Common Core State Standards across Tracked Classrooms: A Critical Investigation of Standards-Based Reform and the Implications for English Education; Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, University of Pennsylvania: Amplifying Previously Silenced Dialogues: An African American Male English Language Arts Teacher as Culturally Responsive Practitioner, Researcher, and Activist; and Kristen Hawley Turner, Fordham University, and Troy Hicks, Central Michigan University: What Difference Does a Decade Make? Digital Writing as Social Justice in Teacher Education.